A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF

DALJI MUSLIM WOMEN

A Synopsis of the PhD thesis submitted for the award of Doctoral Degree in Sociology

TASNEEM BANU ABDUL LATEEF SHAIKH

Research Scholar

PG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
KARNATAK UNIVERSITY, DHARWAD

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Introduction

The progress of a nation is intrinsically linked to the welfare and advancement of all its members. It is worth noting that women constitute more than half of the world's population, yet their participation in socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres often remains disproportionately lower than that of men. Throughout history, social thinkers have consistently questioned the status of women in society. Despite these efforts, it is disheartening to observe that women continue to face significant challenges in asserting their rightful roles. Their invaluable contributions as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters are often overlooked. Women tirelessly manage household responsibilities, care for children, and tend to elderly family members, yet they are frequently excluded from key family decisions. This undervaluation not only undermines their individual potential but also hampers the collective progress of society.

Dalji Muslim Women

Dalji Muslim women play a significant role both as homemakers at their home and as fisherwomen working alongside their husbands. While fishermen focus primarily on their occupation, women take on a wide range of responsibilities beyond fishing. They assist their husbands on the seashore to collect fish and selling fish at markets or door-to-door. During the off-season they dry fish for sale or future use. Many fisherwomen also take contracts to make fishing nets at home.

It is important to note that only women aged 40 to 50 years or older typically engage in selling fish. Very few fisherwomen under the age of 30 or 40 take up fish selling, and those who do are often driven by poverty. The younger generation of women, particularly those below 30 years, are increasingly reluctant to participate in fishing activities. However, they are not focusing on their self-development. Most Dalji girls pursue education only up to the

secondary level, after which their parents either arrange their marriage or enrol them in Arabic madrasas. Youth (boys) of this community mostly involve in fishing after completing their schooling.

Dalji Fisher Women

Belonging to the Muslim community, Dalji fisherwomen face several challenges in their occupation. Firstly, their primary reason for engaging in fish selling is poverty, to support their family's financial condition they contribute to the fishing trade alongside their husbands. Secondly, as fish sellers, they have to interact daily with non-Muslim which is considered contrary to Islamic principles. This has led to unfavourable attitudes from the male members of their community. In response, many of these women have started wearing burqas while selling fish to uphold their religious traditions. Some fisherwomen sell fish in local markets, while others set up stalls along the roadside near their villages. A few operate as small-scale vendors, selling their entire stock of fish to other fisherwomen in the market at an average price. However, not all fisherwomen engage in selling fish daily. Some only sell when their husbands or sons bring home an excess catch. From this surplus, a portion is reserved for household use, and the remainder is sold. Additionally, some fisherwomen specialize in selling dried fish. Those who work daily typically observe Sundays as their weekly day off, while the fishermen take Fridays as their weekly holiday.

Statement of the problem:

This study examines the evolving roles, values, and status of Dalji Muslim women, a group from one of the economically and socially disadvantaged Muslim communities located along the coast of the Uttar Kannada district of Karnataka. This community faces severe challenges including poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and even limited

awareness of their own identity. In India, Muslims constitute a minority group, and Muslim women are often regarded as a “minority within the minority”. Muslim women face unique challenges due to their intersectional identity and the structural constraints tied to religious and cultural practices for example; traditions such as seclusion often hinder their access to education and employment opportunities. Additionally, practices concerning marriage, divorce, and property rights can further restrict their autonomy and decision-making power. While Islam grants women various rights and protections, these opportunities are often constrained by interpretations of rules and traditions, which are presented as measures to safeguard their well-being. These Islamic provisions and their implications will be explored in greater depth in the section on women in Islam.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study focuses on the changing role and the status of Dalji Muslim women. This study was conducted in Vannalli Village of Kumta taluk of Uttar Kannada District, Karnataka. The present study seeks to observe changes in the status of Dalji Muslim community and women in contrast with other Muslim communities and the factors associated with the causation of such changes. It also attempts to examine the causes of their backwardness. The present study has been undertaken with following objectives:

1. To know the historical background of the Dalji Muslim community as a fishing community.
2. To find out the process of nakhudization among Dalji Muslim Community
3. To know the socio-economic background of the Dalji Muslim women.
4. To study the traditional customary practices of Dalji Muslim community.
5. To understand the Dalji people views on their position and community bias.

6. To analyse the improvement that has taken place in the educational status of Muslim women and their attitude towards higher education of their daughters.
7. To portray the attitude towards their women taking up employment outside home and city.

METHOD ND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Universe and the Sample:

The state of Karnataka is located in Southern part of India. The census of 2011 data revealed that, state has 6,10,95,297 of total population in which 12.92 percent constitute Muslims. Out of 31 districts of state none have majority of Muslim population (2011 census report). This study was conducted in Vannalli village of Kumta Taluk of Uttar Kannada district. There is no official data available about the exact population of Dalji Muslim community. According to the information given by the local community leaders, the Uttar Kannada has around 15,000 Dalji Muslim population. They are thickly populated from the Sadashivgad village of Karwar taluk to Gokran, Betkuli, Kimani, Vannalli, Heni, Kagal of Kumta talluk and also found in Honnavar, Manki, Murdeshwar and Bhatkal, and Shiroor village of Udupi district. For the purpose of fieldwork Vannalli Village of Kumta Talluk was selected. This village is completely dominated by Dalji Muslims. Very few Non-Dalji families are found in Vannalli village.

This village is located very near to Sea-shore of Arabian Sea. It is conveniently located for fisheries families. It is helpful for all their fishing activities like catching fish, selling both fresh and dry fish, both men and women drying fish on the rocks near Sea-shore. There is a place for net mending and anchoring small boats on Sea-shore. For selling the fish, women are going door to door to well to do non-Muslim families like local Brahmins

and Dakhni Muslim families. Vannalli village has around 400 Dalji Muslim families, though it is a small village. It is thickly populated as these Muslim families possess more than two to three or more than five children. It was decided to select 200 women respondents for this study. For getting information about Dalji Muslims, some Muslim leaders, religious mouluvis and teachers of the locality were also selected. In fact, all these men provided valuable information about the Dalji Community.

Tools and Techniques:

The present study consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected directly from the Dalji Muslim community through interview schedule. And the secondary data were collected from the libraries, statistical officers, census reports and internet sources reports. To obtain detailed and complete data a standard interview schedule was prepared for the respondents. The schedule contained only pre-coded questions. Interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. Many illiterate women were hesitant to speak with investigator during interview. And some women requested their husbands or sons for better understanding of the situation due to language variations. The researcher also conducted *participant observation method* by staying in Vannalli village and attended marriage ceremonies and different cultural programmes. Each interview took about 1 and half to 2 hours. But the respondents who had more knowledge spent long time in discussing the issues of their community. Respondents who were illiterate or had little education had some difficulty in reporting certain information. After completion of each interview the data were checked for their completeness and edited carefully. After editing, the data were added in code sheets with the help of a code design, which is prepared for the process and tabulation and was done manually directly from the code sheets.

Importance of the Study:

In recent times, Muslim women have undergone significant transformation. Particularly in the field of education, their numbers have been increasing every year. Many are now pursuing technical and medical education. A few of them are working outside their homes as teachers and government employees. Although their participation is relatively low compared to women from other religions, a noticeable shift has occurred among Muslims in India. However, such progress has not been identical across all sub-groups. Certain marginalized and backward communities within Muslims remain largely unaffected by modern advancements. The Dalji community is one such group. This community continues to face extreme poverty, with the majority still engaged in their traditional occupation of fishing. None of its members are found working in private or government sectors. Despite their backwardness, academic studies focusing on this community are nonexistent. This study stands out as one of the few sociological efforts to examine the problems and challenges faced by the Dalji community. Therefore, it holds significant importance in shedding light on the struggles of this underrepresented group

Theoretical Background

The present study draws upon various perspectives from feminist and gender theories. Feminism, as a movement, critically examines the social roles, interests, experiences, and responsibilities of women, along with the political dimensions of gender inequality. The primary objective of feminism is to identify and address the root causes of gender inequality, striving for its complete eradication. This study specifically incorporates the views of prominent liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) and Betty Friedan (1921–2006) to analyze the social status and gender inequality faced by Dalji Muslim women. Furthermore, two additional theoretical frameworks have

been adopted to enrich the analysis: Oscar Lewis's *Culture of Poverty* theory and Amartya Sen's *Social Exclusion* theory. These models are utilized to explore strategies for improving the social and economic conditions of the Dalji Muslim community.

Chapter Scheme of the Study:

The study is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1- Introduction: Provides an introduction, the statement of the problem, and the objectives of the study. It also outlines the research methodology adopted.

Chapter 2- Dalji Muslim community-from originality to present: It offers brief information about the Dalji Muslim community.

Chapter 3- Profile of the Respondents: Portrays the socio-economic profile of the respondents, including details on age, education, marital status, occupation, type of family, and family members.

Chapter 4- Education and Employment of Dalji Muslim women: Examines the educational and occupational status of Dalji Muslim women.

Chapter 5- Problems and Challenges of Dalji Muslim Community: Describes the problems and challenges faced by Dalji Muslim women.

Chapter 6- Major Findings and Conclusion: Contains the summary, major findings, and conclusion.

Major Findings of the Study

The study revealed that the majority of Dalji Muslims belong to a poor socio-economic background. The age and educational level of respondents show that three-fourths (74%) of the women possess only primary education (Grades I-IV). This indicates a discouragement from pursuing higher education. Among the respondents, 10% have completed high school, while 7% are illiterate. The educational status of their children also shows minimal improvement, with nearly half (40.3%) having completed up to Grade IV. Notably, 19.2% are currently in primary school, but 52.8% have discontinued their education before completing primary school. Although 45.8% have completed primary education, many dropped out during higher primary (Grades V-VII). Only 5.1% of children have reached the college level, with the majority (35.3%) currently studying in high school.

The attitude of women respondents towards their daughters is more favorable than toward male family members. Most female respondents expressed a desire to educate their daughters up to high school or college. However, the data shows that socio-economic conditions play a significant role in limiting these aspirations. Income levels of Dalji Muslim women indicate that 57.1% of illiterate respondents earn between ₹10,000 and ₹30,000 annually, while 43% of primary-educated women earn between ₹10,000 and ₹40,000. Only 30% of the respondents earn above ₹40,000 annually.

Sons of respondents typically continue the traditional occupation of fishing, while daughters are not engaged in this trade. Occupational data show that 42.5% of the women are housewives, while an equal percentage (42.5%) of work as fisherwomen. Other occupations include fish net-making, domestic maid work, and tailoring (12.5%). A mere 1.5% of women work as private madrasa teachers, and only two respondents hold government jobs as an Anganwadi cook and teacher. None of the Dalji women work in professional roles.

Religious education is a vital part of Dalji Muslim life, with the majority (86.5%) of respondents having basic religious education and 11.5% possessing a medium level. A significant proportion (71.5%) values both religious and modern education. While 92% of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward women's education, a disparity exists between their stated attitudes and actual practices. Most parents do not allow their daughters to pursue higher education due to various reasons, including the distance to schools and colleges, co-education concerns, fear of harassment, and the need for daughters to stay home to care for aging parents. Consequently, 80.6% of daughters complete only primary education, with 53.6% discontinuing during high school. Additionally, 66.6% of daughters attend madrasa for religious education instead of formal schooling.

The respondents' unfavorable attitudes towards their daughters' higher education stem from multiple factors. About 55% of respondents cited the lack of separate educational institutions for girls, while 25% stated that higher education for girls is against Islam. Employment opportunities also face restrictions, as 59% of respondents disapprove of sending their daughters to work. The primary reason (49%) is that women working outside home is viewed as un-Islamic. If employment is permitted, it is usually restricted to jobs deemed suitable by parents.

The study highlights that none of the respondents work in professional roles. Dalji Muslim women are one of the few Muslim communities in Karnataka engaged in fish selling, with 41.17% selling fish in markets, 11.76% selling fish door-to-door as hawkers, and 11% dealing exclusively in dry fish. Monthly income levels vary, with 35.2% earning 6,001–7,000, 29.4% earning 2,500–5,000, and only 11.7% earning above 7,000. The rainy season, which disrupts fishing activities, creates significant livelihood challenges for the community.

Male members of the Dalji community generally hold unfavorable attitudes towards women working as fisherwomen. More than half (58.8%) of the women wear burqas while selling fish. The study also found a strong aversion to birth control methods,

with 93.5% of respondents favouring large families. Most respondents believe birth control is against Islam and view high fertility as a virtue.

Several Muslim communities reside along the coast of Uttar Kannada district, including Navayat and Mappilla Muslims, who claim Arab ancestry and follow the Shafi school of thought, as well as Dakni, Maniyar, Monin, Gulam, and Mughal Muslims, who follow the Hanafi school. These dominant groups perceive Dalji Muslims as inferior, leading to social and economic exclusion. The Dalji community is predominantly engaged in fishing, a profession considered unclean and unhygienic by other groups.

In response to this exclusion, the Dalji community has attempted to adopt the culture of dominant Muslim groups, referring to themselves as "Nakhuda Muslims" and changing their surnames to "Sheikh" to escape humiliation. Despite these efforts, social exclusion persists. Officially, Dalji Muslims are categorized as "Dalji" under Category I by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission, but many community members remain unaware of their official classification, leading to a lack of access to government benefits and opportunities.

In modern India, while Muslim women have made strides in socio-economic and political fields, Dalji Muslim women remain confined within the domestic sphere. Their reliance on traditional occupations and their exclusion from formal employment and education contribute to their continued socio-economic backwardness. The study found that patriarchal dominance restricts women's autonomy, particularly regarding their daughters' education. Religious education is prioritized, with many families enrolling at least one child in a madrasa. However, while respondents acknowledged that education can elevate women’s status in religious contexts, this has not translated into significant social or economic progress. Limited access to education has further hindered Dalji women from fully expressing their views or utilizing available resources.

High fertility is a significant issue within the Dalji Muslim community, where women average 5.7 children each. This high fertility rate increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality. Despite the availability of maternal and child health facilities, a lack of education and awareness prevents their effective utilization.

In conclusion, the Dalji Muslim community faces severe socio-economic and cultural challenges, with women bearing the brunt of poverty, exclusion, and patriarchal constraints. This study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve education, employment, and healthcare access for Dalji Muslim women, thereby fostering their social and economic empowerment.

(Dr. Shaukath Azim)
Research Guide

(Tasneem Banu Abdul Lateef Shaik)
Research Student